DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 704 HE 027 589

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TITLE Forging Links with Further Education Colleges--The Why and the Wherefore.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 8p.; Presented as part of a panel discussion entitled "Scottish and American Experiences in Collaborating between Institutions" at the Annual AIR Forum "Information Architects for the New Century" (34th, New Orleans, LA, May 29-June 1, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Administration; Community Colleges; Cross Cultural Studies; Enrollment; *Federal Legislation; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; *Government School Relationship; Higher Education; *Institutional Cooperation; School Policy; *Transfer Policy; *Universities
IDENTIFIERS Napier University (Scotland); *Scotland; United States

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses collaboration between institutions of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) in Scotland, governmental policy toward postsecondary education in Scotland, and Napier University's response to these policies. FE in Scotland is analogous to community college education in the United States, providing vocational and transfer programs to secondary school graduates. Recent governmental pressure to increase enrollments at HE institutions with only limited increases in funding has led to an increased emphasis on FE-HE linkages to reduce costs. Scotland's Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 encourages increased collaboration between HE and FE institutions by making their educational programs and course offerings more compatible and centralizing the funding of both types of institutions. Napier University has established closer links with local FE institutions, implementing student transfer agreements and multi-institution programs. Such cooperation will allow institutions in both sectors to increase student intake in targeted areas and at levels that suit them best. Comparisons with the community college-university relationship in the United States are also discussed. (MDM)

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ED 372 704

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FORGING LINKS WITH FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES - THE WHY AND THE WHEREFORE

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PRESENTED AS PART OF A PANEL DISCUSSION
ENTITLED "SCOTTISH AND AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN COLLABORATING BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS"
AT THE 34TH ANNUAL AIR FORUM
"INFORMATION ARCHITECTS FOR THE NEW CENTURY"
at
NEW ORLEANS, USA
29 MAY - 1 JUNE 1994

HE027 589

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years increasing pressure has been put on Higher Education (HE) Institutions to increase their student numbers with little or no commensurate increase in resources. Indeed, in real terms, it could be argued that funding provided by Central Government has in fact been reduced. One solution to this dilemma has been to create and increase links with the Further Education (FE) colleges with a view to ensuring additional students, mainly, in the later years of the courses offered in the Higher Education establishments.

These moves have become necessary - and also possible - as a result of major changes in the structure of Further and Higher Education in Scotland in recent years.

2. POLICY ON WIDER ACCESS

The UK government has long been committed to a policy of wider access and an increased participation rate in Higher Education. The Government White Paper published in 1987, 'Higher Education - Meeting the Challenge', strongly recommended that Higher Education Institutions should make every effort to widen access to, and increase participation in, their courses - particularly by forging closer links with Further Education Colleges.

This policy was reaffirmed in the 1991 White Paper, 'Higher Education - A New Framework', where the Government committed itself to 'make places available to all who have the necessary intellectual competence, motivation and maturity to benefit from Higher Education and who wish to do so' and this commitment was underlined by the Government's stated aim to increase participation in Higher Education in Scotland to 40% by the Year 2000.

3. THE FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 1992

The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 expanded on the Government's policies in relation to wider access by positively encouraging Higher Education institutions to increase provision of degree courses and two year full time diplomas with a vocational emphasis; to increase opportunities for flexibility via accelerated courses, multiple entry/exit points, part time study and Credit Accumulation and Transfer schemes; to forge closer associations with FE Colleges; and to develop courses that would meet the needs of the economy, employers and students with varying needs and backgrounds.

In addition the old "binary line" between the 'old' Universities and the Scottish Central Institutions (CIs), Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education was removed, with many of the CIs and the Polytechnics being granted University Status.

The funding of this new unified Higher Education sector became the responsibility of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), established on 1 June 1992, and responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland via the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED). At the same time the responsibility for, and the funding of, the Further Education Colleges was transferred from the regional education authorities to

the Secretary of State for Scotland, also via the SOED, the funding of the Further Education Colleges being the responsibility of a separate Further Education Funding Council established on 1 April 1993. With effect from that same date the Further Education Colleges became 'incorporated' - establishing Boards of Management responsible for strategic decision making and for the management of finances, human resources and property.

4. EXPANSION AMIDST CONSTRAINTS

While the Higher Education sector is expected to have increased its participation rate to 40% by the Year 2000, a 13% increase in Further Education participation is expected over the next three years. In addition the Government has confirmed that additional funding will be available for increases in the number of part time students enrolled. Simultaneously a change in the method of student funding in HE means that Institutions receive full funding only for the number of 'Full Time Equivalent' (FTE) students approved by SHEFC and fee income only for any FTEs in excess of the agreed figure. Both FE and HE Institutions are being encouraged to seek value for money and to generate an increasing percentage of their own income. So far as Napier is concerned income is generated through commercial activities - including consultancy, short courses, in house training activities etc - all of which are channelled through its own company - Napier University Ventures Limited.

5. NAPIER UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

Napier has long been committed to the tenets of wider access (McLachlan and Wood: March/1994) - its student intake, which is drawn from all walks of life and covers a wide age range, includes school leavers aged 17 and 18 with traditional entry qualifications; graduates looking for postgraduate qualifications; employees looking to improve their chances of promotion and gain professional qualifications; mature students and overseas students.

In its mission statement Napier stated its commitment to improve articulation; the modularisation of its undergraduate degree programmes; greater flexibility in course provision; a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme and closer links with the Further Education sector.

Yet staff are faced with increasing pressures and diminishing resources. Accommodation is at a premium; there is little opportunity for obtaining additional staff; there is increased pressure on existing staff to increase the research base of the Departments in the face of the new funding arrangements operated by SHEFC in line with the Research Assessment Exercise; there is increased pressure on the existing staff to increase the quality of their teaching in view of the impending Quality Assessment Visits and the SHEFC policy of linking funding to the results of the Quality Assessment Exercise - a 5% increase in funded student places in a cognate area achieving an Excellent rating; there is increased pressure on existing staff to generate a greater percentage of the Department's income via consultancy, short courses for industry etc in line with Governmental policy on resource generation - and yet there is still an expectation that they will recruit ever increasing student numbers to ensure, at minimum, a steady state of funding for the Department. How can all

of these expectations be met within the existing constraints without the quality of provision being prejudiced? A formula for increasing student numbers, without putting additional pressure on staff or existing resources was required.

6. THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR RESPONSE

While Higher Education Institutions can attract students from throughout the United Kingdom and from overseas the Further Education Colleges tend, in the main, to serve the needs of their local community. To increase their student intake they have had to make what they were offering more attractive. In the last few years further education has undergone radical changes in the curriculum, delivery and assessment of courses and in the management and operation of its colleges. Major developments have included the introduction of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs); the unitisation of Higher National Courses and the introduction of National Certificate Modules, awarded and accredited by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC). These have included new forms of assessment, mainly coursework based, with few, if any, formal examinations, which have attracted the less confident students who discover, to their surprise, that their abilities outreach their expectations. The content of the new competence based awards is strongly influenced by the prospective employers ensuring that courses are relevant, so far as industry and commerce are concerned, and that students acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for employment or for progression to Higher Education.

Being in charge of their own future, the Further Education Colleges can now invest in areas of specific expertise, ensuring access to a comprehensive range of education and training and maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of their colleges. But students' expectations have risen in the past few years - whereas before further education was seen as an end in itself it is now looked on as a stepping stone to greater things. On the one hand we have further education students with aspirations to progress to higher education and on the other hand we have higher education institutions needing to increase student numbers but with problems of limited accommodation and over stretched staff - how can the needs of both be met?

7. THE SOLUTION

In keeping with Government policy on increased student numbers in FE and HE, and acting within existing resource constraints, the solution for both sectors was closer collaboration and the establishment of informal and formal links between institutions in both sectors - or an erosion of the 'new binary line'.

Napier had long had informal links with local FE Colleges and an Institutional Collaboration Working Party was established to explore ways of developing and expanding links in the future with a view to ensuring increasing student numbers in the later years of courses when accommodation was not so restricted and class sizes were smaller.

The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) was established to help more adults gain places in Higher Education. Successful SWAP students are guaranteed entry to a higher education course in a specific Institution by agreement between the teaching staff of the FE Colleges offering the SWAP courses and the HE Institutions collaborating in the scheme. In 1992-93 approximately 8% of all entries to Higher Education came by this route.

Formal articulation arrangements have been agreed whereby students on an FE course, who attain a specified standard, will be permitted direct entry to the later years of an HE agreed course at the participating HE Institution. At Napier such links in the Business School include articulation arrangements such as that between Falkirk College of Technology and the Department of Business Studies (HND Business Administration Year 2 to BA Business Studies Year 2 and to Year 3 BA Business Administration on completion of a bridging course); teaching co-operation arrangements such as the one established between Lauder College and the Department of Accounting and Law whereby lecturers from Napier will teach on the second year of Lauder's HND Accounting course with reciprocal direct entry arrangements for successful students to the Department's degree and professional accounting courses; and a franchise arrangement with Dumfries and Galloway College of Technology (DAGCOT) whereby the Business School Common First Year (a first year curriculum common to four degree programmes (McLachlan and Wood: February/1992)) is taught at DAGCOT by DAGCOT staff, with students transferring to the second year of their chosen degree at Napier (McLachlan and Wood 1994).

On an Institutional basis Napier has signed an agreement with Lothian College of Health Studies making that College an Associate College of Napier University and providing the opportunity for the College to offer degree courses validated by Napier.

8. CONCLUSIONS

FE and HE Institutions and the students benefit from the closer links being forged between the FE and HE sectors. Institutions in both sectors can increase student intake in targeted areas and at levels that suit them best. Staff in FE Colleges can teach on higher level courses - contributing to their professional development and increasing their satisfaction in their role in education. Staff in the HE Institutions can count on additional students in the later years of courses, with the required educational background and skills, which compensate for any students who withdraw during, or at the end of, their first year of study. Students, from a variety of backgrounds and educational experience, can progress by the shortest possible route to achieve the highest possible qualification commensurate with their level of ability. This in turn means a better qualified workforce for the nation as a whole.

9. CHALLENGES FOR THE REST OF THE DECADE

Already further changes are looming that will affect the provision of education into the next decade. Institutions are being urged to 'Build Bridges Between Academic and Business Communities' to ensure that they meet the demand for expansion, while maintaining diversity and quality, with little increase in revenue from the Government.

The structure of the academic year is under discussion (Irvine 1993) and it is anticipated that there will be a move to a three semester academic year, commencing in early September, and with teaching ongoing throughout the summer.

There are radical changes proposed to the structure of upper secondary education in schools (SOED 1994) for introduction in Session 1997-98. These would mean a "streaming" of students into vocational and academic streams and the introduction of new Advanced Highers - all of which will have implications for student intake at FE and HE levels.

10. COMPARISON WITH THE UNITED STATES EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In Scotland, generally speaking, further education courses are taught in further education colleges and higher education courses in higher education institutions. 80% of all vocational education and training in Scotland is delivered by further education colleges.

Degree provision remains the responsibility of the Higher Education sector with, in Scotland, Degree programmes lasting three years and Honours degrees four years.

Articulation arrangements allow students to complete their FE qualification in the local FE College and then to transfer to later years of HE courses in specified Higher Education Institutions.

Normally students enter FE between the ages of 16 and 17, and HE between the ages of 17 and 18.

While staff in the HE sector may teach in FE Colleges it would be very unusual for staff in the FE sector to teach in a Higher Education Institution.

In the USA, we understand that the norm is for students to complete a two year, sub-degree course at a Community College and then to advance to a linked University to complete a further two years which then brings a graduate award. Both Instuitions work independently, but in a co-ordinated manner.

As an example, in 1991 George Mason University enrolled 896 transfers from their main feeder institution - Northern Viginia Community College. These figures were out of an undergraduate total of initial enrolments of 3542 - details as follows:

Undergraduate Total		3542	
Transfer			
Northern Virginia Community College	896		25.3%
Other VA	325		9.2%
Other Starts	589	1810	16.6%
First Time Freshmen		1732	
		3542	

In addition, George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College have developed an understanding of strong cooperation and seamless articulation of programs. Lower-division offerings at Northern Virginia Community College's Arlington and Alexandria Campuses will feed into upper-division courses that will be offered at George Mason University - Arlington.

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